

SATURDAY, SEPT. 24, 1870.

Subject: The Growth of Christ in us.

# PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

## SERMONS

PREACHED BY

### HENRY WARD BEECHER.



NEW-YORK:

J. B. FORD & CO., No. 39 PARK ROW.

1870.

AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY, AGENTS FOR THE TRADE.

European Agents, SAMPSON LOW, SON & MARSTON, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, London

Sold by all Carriers and News Dealers,

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# THE GROWTH OF CHRIST IN US.

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"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you."—GAL. IV., 19.

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No one can fail to observe, in reading our Lord's discourses, how unlike a king or great person he carried himself upon earth; how he loved to bring home his heavenly nature to his disciples and friends by all the figures and symbols which belonged to domestic life. That which belonged to us—whatever was human—he selected as a garment, and clothed himself with it. He was parent, brother, friend. He was for the hungry, bread; and for the thirsty, water. He was the light—a star sometimes, and a candle at other times. He was a vine. He was a husbandman. He was a shepherd. He was a merchant, a rich proprietor, a householder. Almost every element of use, in one way or another, he attaches to himself, either as a title, or by some parable.

Into this peculiar method of representation, no one of his apostles entered with such fullness of sympathy and such richness, as Paul. It would be interesting, if we had time, to run through the variations which Paul produced on this theme. For I think it can be shown that in his hands there is scarcely one great elemental law, hardly a familiar phenomenon, in the world, which, in the Gospels and in the Epistles conjointly, is not associated tenderly with the name of Jesus Christ. Our text is a very striking instance under this head. Bold as the Hebrews were on matters where we are exceedingly sensitive, it is yet without offence that Paul represents himself as a mother, without saying so. He says:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again."

They were carried in his soul, yet unborn. In another place he says:

"Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel."

Kindled with this imagery, his mind shot along the figure, and took another form of it, without note or warning; and he says that Christ was being carried in them, as it were, a babe unborn. They

were the mothers, and Christ was to be born into their souls. This having Christ in us you will all recognize as a not unfamiliar thought ; but the apostle's idea is that we are Bethlehem, as it were—that we are the stable, as it were. No, we are the mother, as it were. Christ is being born into each one of us, severally, a babe ; and our Christ, even when grown to years, and mature, is, after all, the Christ that was born in us.

Without stopping to illustrate other points in the figure, we shall carry it out in some particularity in regard to practical developments in Christian life and experience.

Christ was God. He was sent to interpret to men God's nature, his disposition, his sympathy and love ; to show men that, on the very field where all their defeats occurred, it was possible for one to live purely and truly in his body and in his circumstances. Christ took upon himself the human body. In Scripture language, he was *God manifest in the flesh*. He *took upon himself the form of a servant*. He was very God, walking in the limitation and circumscription of the human body, this limitation and circumscription making him man. And there is no other manhood which is like that. Our manhood is but a faint and far-off dream and image of that. We come to true manhood only when we come to it through divinity. But our Saviour did not descend from heaven like a sun full-orbed, glorious. He came into the world as a babe. He went to the lowest bound of human weakness. He opened the door into life through which every babe comes. Nor did he then suddenly unsheath his bloom, and instantly spring up in fragrant beauty. He was as a *root out of dry ground*, according to the prediction of the prophets. He was a babe. He as a babe grew, came into boyhood, and passed through, gradually, all the stages of unfolding. He was a real boy. He had the imperfections and limitations of other boys. He experienced their nascent hopes and desires. Then he passed to immature manhood ; and then to full manhood. He went through a long line of natural development, that he might be tried just as we are tried.

Now, although the apostle nowhere carries out this into a full allegory, yet it may be clearly seen that this thought dwelt in his mind ; viz., that as Christ came into this world, and was first a babe, and then a youth, and finally a man, so there was an order in the stages of our personal experience ; and that Christ in us was born, first as a babe, and went on through all the stages of youth up to maturity ; so that we have in the spiritual experience of our nature the parallel, the analogue, of that which Christ himself went through.

At its first entrance, this divine, disinterested and authoritative love in the human soul is not in full power. The first experience in



the soul, of Christ, who is the spirit of love, and of a love which carries conscience and wisdom with it, is a nascent experience. We are babes in this element. Small, is it, as a grain of mustard seed. Obscure, is it, as the hidden yeast. Helpless, is it, as new-born infancy. When a child is born, the great world exists and is organized around about it. Here are tremendous forces of every kind. Here are natural laws, and secondary laws which are framed by men for the purposes of society, and which are second only in force and necessity to natural laws. And the child is ignorant of them all, is helpless before them all, and must lean upon the bosom of another, and learn, little by little, first how to control natural law, and then how to control civil law. For laws are not masters, but servants, and he who knows first how to obey them may afterward ride them; and they will carry him with the power that God has infused into them.

When the babe first comes into life, everything is against him. All the great machinery goes grinding and thundering by it; and the child has neither knowledge of it, nor experience in it, nor power over it. He stands, as it were, outside, waiting to be indoctrinated into the conditions of the world into which he comes. So it is in the infancy of Christ in the human soul. All the channels of our life have been filled up. And this divine birth, this babe-experience, as it were, of Christ in the soul, takes place surrounded on all sides by master passions organized, by a character already ordained, and by habits already fixed and firm and operative. And that element of Christ which is called *the Christ in us*, that new disposition in us which is like him, is to pass through the infancy of learning, unfolding. How rightly to understand, how rightly to act, to obey, and then to control, is to be found out little by little, and by just such steps as those by which infancy finds how to manage the world that is round about it.

The first estate of infancy, therefore, is to be fed, warmed, nourished. It is not to be thrust out on the errands which are proper to universal manhood in its maturity. It must be carried in the arms, or it will perish. And so the germs of Christian life, when they first begin, are but germs, tender, and needing nourishment, and watching, and care, and more than they can give to themselves. So that they who are born into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, are not fit, at the moment of their conversion, to be teachers of others. They may be witnesses of what Christ has done for them; but they are infants. They are but just born. The Christian then is but in its infancy. As in his mortal life Jesus was, as I have said, a boy, a youth, so there is a corresponding stage in the normal Christian experience—a stage of hope, eager, expectant, unqualified by experience, but fixed by zeal. This is that stage in which, having gained certain degrees of power and

knowledge, mightily set on by buoyancy and hopefulness, youth plans and executes, full of the glow of enterprise. The virtues at that time are intensely active. The faults of that period are the faults of overstimulation; of untempered, undisciplined strength; and the temptations and defeats and victories are marked with the peculiarities of youthful immaturity. They are unripe; and their sins are sins of unripeness.

And as it is in youth, so, precisely, is it in Christian development. After the primal birth into the kingdom, comes the youth of Christ, as it were, in men—the limitations of unknowing, inexperience, strong zeal, barrenness, and untempered virtues. There are stages of the soul's development, if we could trace them out, through which we pass, that precisely correspond to certain stages of the outward secular life. First comes the childhood. Then comes the youth. Then comes the manhood. Then come consolidated impulses, which are habits. Then come virtues, which have cast off their germ-forms, half grown into perfect symmetry. Then come characters with strong foundations. And the walls of the mind are carried up, and the whole structure, more or less built already, tends to instant completion; to full-developed power; to strong, rich, ripe joyousness in the participation of life. And there is precisely the corresponding experience in the development of the spiritual life. Christ is born in us as a babe; and then there is the development, through youth, to full manhood in the Christian soul.

This great truth, therefore, is to be borne in mind, that Christian life begins at the point of weakness, and goes on by regular normal stages to maturity. It is first a spark, and then a flame, hidden in much smoke, and at last a pure and glowing coal.

With this unfolding of the primal idea, I proceed, now, to make some applications.

1. Children and youth may become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and may be safely gathered into the Christian fold, if only their parents and their pastors will be content to receive the babe-Christ in the young convert, or the young Christian. Churches, parents, and teachers are to bring up the children under their care *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; but to a very large extent Christians have brought up their children in the hope that when they shall have arrived at years of discretion (which are usually supposed to be somewhere from fifteen to twenty-one years of age) they will then themselves become Christians. I hold that it is possible so to rear our children that they shall be converted from the cradle, and grow up *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*—some without a break, and some subject to these normal disturbances which come from physical causes in



the readjustment of the system at its maturity. If Christian parents and Christian teachers were consistent, and were in faith of the true Christ Jesus, I believe that generations of children might be brought up who never would know the point at which the transition was made. They would be taught to love Christ, and to adopt the great Christian element of character—love—and, by it, to cast out evil, to build, and to acquire habits and experiences, so that when they came to man's estate it would not be through all the tanglements, besetments and soilings of an ordinary earthly experience. They would come honorable, truthful, loving, full of faith, full of hope, full of purity, from the cradle to the church. And I do not simply believe this to be possible in rare cases. I do not believe there will ever be a day of millenium. I do not believe there will ever be a prevalence of Christianity, until, instead of trying to fish for the few adults that can be brought from evil into good, we learn how to take life at its beginnings, and to train generations from the first to true manhood, passing through infancy and youth into the full development of Christian life.

Persons, we all know, are more susceptible at the early age than at any other. Children are not superior to men in knowledge, nor in strength, nor in discrimination. There are a thousand of the acquirements by which a man battles with the world that they are not superior in. But there is one all important principle which belongs to childhood, and not to any other time; viz: that peculiar development of the soul by which it knows how to take hold of another, and to borrow its light from that other.

To borrow an orchard illustration, there is but one period of the year in which you can graft well. It may be possible to graft successfully at other times; but there is one period when you must make the transfer if you would take a bud from one tree, and graft it into another, and have it produce its kind, and do the best that it is capable of doing. There is but just one season when the bark lifts easy, and the staff is in the right condition.

There is a time, also, when the little natures bud easily, and graft easily. It is possible to graft them at other times, by extra elaboration; but more than half of the grafts will *blow out*, as the saying is. There is a period, however, in which ninety-nine out of a hundred will stick and grow. For all the adaptations of the child at that time are such as to incline it to borrow its life from another. It feeds upon another instinctively. It is a little parasite. It is but the transfer of that which is its need and instinct to the blessed Saviour. And then it becomes a Christian child. And so, adhering to Christ by love and by trust, and drawing its little life from Christ, it begins the Christian career. And they would go on and grow in thousands and thousands

of instances, if it were not that parents have the absurd notion that when Christ is born into persons, he is a self-registering and self-taking-care-of Christ, so that they say, "If my child is born of God, God will take care of his own work." As if a pomologist should come in and say, "I have put a graft into that tree, and if nature is true to herself, she will take care of that graft." Nobody says so about trees. The man binds up the graft so that it shall be held in its place, so that the water shall not get in, and so that it shall not be blown out, until it gains strength sufficient to take care of itself; and then he leaves it to the force of nature.

But many people, in bringing up their children *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, look with great suspicion on early Christian experiences. They are afraid of abnormal growths. They are afraid of such material as Sunday-school libraries and biographies are made up of. They regard early conversions as indicating disease at the root, or in the body of the tree. They do not believe in children being really Christians, because they do not see in the child that which they would look for in a ripe Christian. But if they would look for a babe Jesus in a little babe, they would find that there. And if they would treat the babe Christ as they would treat the babe boy, or the babe girl, and nourish it, and carry it in their arms, and rear it, step by step; if they would treat it as a little child embosomed and arm-encircled; if they would shield it as it goes through all temptation and all trial, they would make straighter Christians, better branched Christians, more fruitful Christians, than those that are made, at last, out of old and bad growths, by lopping away the pernicious boughs. These never will be the ripest and most symmetrical characters in the Church of Christ till we learn how to bring them up from the seed in the Spirit of the blessed Master.

There are many persons whose children give every evidence of being truly Christian, but whose parents shrink from bringing them into the fold. "Ah!" say they, "what if they should fall away?"

The shepherd's boy comes in and says, "the ewe has dropped a lamb far out in the pasture; shall I bring it up to the barn, and put it inside of the yard?" "No," says the shepherd, "let it stay out to-night, and if the wolf does not get it, and the cold chill does not kill it, and it lives till to-morrow, and the next day, it will be worth keeping, and you can bring it in." But if the lamb can live in spite of the cold and wind, and without the care of the shepherd, he does not need to bring it in then.

There are many persons who say of the young, "Shall they be gathered into the Church? Shall we run the risk of their bringing disgrace upon the Church by their fall? Which is the most important,



in the name of God, the Church, or the souls of men, for which Christ died? The Church, looked at as the servant of God's dear people, rises before my thought most beautiful; but if the Church dare to take the place of the soul of a man, and make itself more precious and nobler than the soul, the poorest and lowest and least, I will repudiate it. The servant has usurped the place of the master, under such circumstances. For the Church is God's slave, sent to take care of God's children, and if the Church is good for anything, it is good to take in little children, and to shelter them; to take in the wayfarer, and to shelter him; to take in the spiritually poor, and to shelter them.

Suppose that they do break down, and do not get well in the Church? Is a hospital brought into disgrace because patients die there whom the doctors have tried to cure? Is a school brought into disgrace because some dullards go in fools and come out idiots? And shall a Church be always trying to take care of itself, instead of taking care of that which God loves better than anything else—the souls of his dear children? Bring your little children into the Church. Let Christ be born in them the hope of glory. Let there be a babe Christ in their little experiences. Let them be formed into classes. Do not leave them out with the wolf. Do not leave them until they are strong enough to go along without a Church, and then bring them in, See that they are taken care of and nourished.

Those who have been brought into the Church young within the circuit of my own experience, have, on the whole, with single exceptions of miscarriage, here and there, endured, and come out into a true Christian life with far better prospects, and more symmetrical dispositions, than those who have been brought in late in life.

2. One may be a Christian who is yet very far from the beauty and symmetry and manhood of piety. We are not to suppose that they only are Christians who are *beautiful* Christians, or who are embellished with all Christian graces. A man may be a Christian, and his Christ may be a babe. A man may be a Christian, and the Christian nature in him may yet be, as it were, in its boyhood. A man may be a Christian, and yet the Christ in him may have reached only that stage in which it enters upon young manhood. A man may be a Christian, and the Christ in him may have entered upon his ministry, as it were, in the full ripeness of his manhood.

We are not, therefore, to suppose that persons are not Christians because they are very imperfect; because they break down in a thousand places; because they do with their religion just what children do with their worldly knowledge and power.

If a man's heart is in the cause, and he enlists in the army, he is a soldier, not when he is a veteran, but when he enlists. He is a soldier

just as really when his name goes down on the roll, and he goes out with the awkward squad to the first drill, as after he has been in the army five years—although he is not a soldier with the same degree and amplitude of experience. He is a soldier provided his heart is right, and he loves the cause, and he joins in earnest. The degree of imperfection and ignorance that is in him has nothing to do with the fact of his being a soldier.

When one approaches a school-house, the word sent out is never, "Have you learned?" The word of greeting at the school-house door always is, "Will you learn?" And he is a scholar who can say, "Yes, I have come to learn." For, shall the encyclopædia go to school to the spelling-book? Shall a rich, ripe, large, learned nature go back to the primary elements of experience? They who need the school, they who need the patience, the forbearance, the rule and discipline, are those who have but little, and wish to increase that little.

Therefore, they who have a spark of grace in their souls are Christians; but they are Christians beginning. They who have germs planted are Christians, only they are Christians afar off in the spring and seed-time—not in the summer and autumn—of the Christian experience. When a man has once looked up to God in the consciousness of his imperfection and sinfulness and transgression in this mortal life, and said, "I take the royalty of love as my ideal, and that law is my law, and love shall sit in the centre, and bring to judgment in me everything that is wicked, and cruel, and selfish, and unduly proud, and envious, and hateful; and, plied by the power of love, I will fight on the right and on the left; and I will subdue myself to that state of love"—when a man makes that declaration in sincerity, he has begun a Christian life. He is in the early stages of childhood; but he has begun it. For, the erecting of that right principle in the soul, and the beginning, by it, to subdue every part of the soul to the Lord Jesus Christ, is the setting up of the kingdom of God in the soul.

The one characteristic, critical thing, is the coming into sympathy with God, and receiving the impulse and purpose to organize the life on the principle of love, in all its equalities. If that element is found, the mere question of concomitant experience is a question of indifference. Some men are born into the kingdom of God with very great joy; and the joy is a pleasant thing to have; it has its incidental benefits; but, after all, it is not the ecstasy of fruition that is significant. It is that silent other thing; viz., the principle at the core of your life which undertakes to organize your whole being on the law of love. And that may be established in a man without any outward experience. A person may come to a state in which he means to be like Christ, and means to cut off everything that hinders his being like



Christ, and to enforce outward and inward compliance to this law of love in Jesus Christ; and yet, he may not have light nor joy. But it is the raising up of that standard, the vindicating of that sovereign law in the soul, which constitutes the beginning of the Christian life. If it comes with joy, so much the better. If it does not come with joy, it is none the less true conversion.

3. In a Christian life, as in the ordinary life, there are two principles at work—first, the force of nature in the steady growth and unfolding of our normal powers; and secondly, the voluntary drill which, working in harmony with nature, we call *education*. A child, even if he received no instruction, would, by a natural process, grow taller and broader and stronger. His bones, by the law of nature, become better bones; his muscles become better muscles; and the brain develops itself, by the mere operation of things upon him, without school-house or instructor. And every man would make a certain degree of development and growth by the mere unfolding of his natural powers in this world. That, however, is not considered as enough. We hold that what may be called involuntary development must be supplemented by voluntary development, or drill. Every person, in order to grow to true manhood, besides what nature is doing for him, is to do a good deal for himself. He has to educate his eye, his ear, his tongue, his hand. He has to learn the trade that shall support him, or the profession which he will follow. It is astonishing for one to see what an amount of drill and spontaneous intuitional power we store up in ourselves, to attain *education*, as we call it.

It is precisely the same in the Christian life. As we are drilled in learning, in art, in virtue, in mechanic skill, in husbandry, in war, in commerce; as we are drilled to be, as it were, apprentices in those things in which we would excel in natural life, so, precisely, we need to be drilled in the Christian life. All men in Christ Jesus would have a certain growth and development, involuntarily, by the mere progress and unfolding of life and nature in them; but if any one is to have more than this spontaneous and natural development, it must be the result of special drill.

Christian graces, if I might so say without being misapprehended, are like so many trades. They are not to be learned theoretically; and certainly they are not created in us by the mere operation of the Spirit, nor by the forces of sanctified nature. We learn them just as we learn anything in outward life. It is supposed that the Spirit of God makes men humble; that it, as it were, sends humility into them. Just as dew falls, and orbs itself on the bearded grass, gemmed and jewelled on a summer's morning; so men think that the Christian graces fall down out of the great heavenly concave above them; and that all one

knows is, that he went to sleep a violet dry, and woke up a violet wet and beautiful! Many persons think that meekness, and gentleness, and humility, and faith, and patience, and hope, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are divine gifts. They *are* divine gifts, to be sure. So is corn a divine gift; so is wine a divine gift; and so are cattle on a thousand hills divine gifts; but men have to work for them. God gives them to man's industry, and not to his laziness. All gifts are divine gifts in such a sense as that. If the connection between the soul and God were to stop, these things would never take place; but He works together with us to will and to do these things. No man ever came to a state of Christian eminence by waiting and praying alone.

For instance, if you are going to learn humility, you must learn as a babe. You must learn, just as you would learn to be an artist. An artist may have natural aptitudes; artistic talent may be an inspirational tendency in some persons; but there never was a Michael Angelo nor a Raphael who did not go through drill. Though a man has genius, he has to put his eye to school, and his hands to school; and all his thoughts have to go to school; and it is only by months and months and years and years of assiduous, discriminating practice, that he comes to be an immortal Raphael or Michael Angelo. And if in the cases of men of genius this is so, how much more must it be so in the cases of ordinary men! It is a universal law.

Now, no man ever was humble except he learned humility. You have felt what you supposed was humility because you prayed for it, and it came. Why yes, you had a flush of it; but you never had humility that you wore as a garment, that had not been wrought out. You have come to it by the suffering of the household, or by your voluntary endeavor, step by step, of Christian experience. You have been trained and drilled into it, as a soldier is drilled into military movements, and into prompt and almost unthinking obedience. Humility must be worked up from the lower stages into the higher stages.

Men say, "I supposed that if I became a Christian I should have faith; but it seems to me as though my faith were not as large as a grain of mustard-seed." Let me see your faith. Where is it? He holds up what he calls his faith, and says, "There it is;" and sure enough, it is no bigger than a grain of mustard seed. What have you done with it? "I have always kept it in my pocket, and prayed that God would increase it." Why did you not plant it? Did you suppose a grain of mustard-seed would grow in your pocket? Put it into the soil; give it moisture, give it rain, give it sunlight, give it summer; and then it will begin to thrive. Culture it; keep the weeds away; and God's sun will help it. And that grain of mustard-seed will grow, so that the birds will yet sing in the branches of it.



Persons say, "I lack faith." Have you ever studied for faith? Have you ever searched after faith? Have you ever drilled for faith? Have you ever put yourself to school for faith? Have you practiced it? And in practicing it, have you sought to see, when you missed, why you missed, and when you gained, how you might augment that gain in your next endeavor. Every Christian grace must be put to school. Or, to go back to the other figure, it must be bound out to apprenticeship.

And so it is with joy and peace in believing. Joy comes by flashes. So do warm days in January come by flashes. And what can you do except look out and enjoy them and thank God? But the birds do not come back for one day in January, nor for two. And the grass does not grow in January for one day or for two. The birds do not come, and you do not have grass, till one warm day succeeds another. One flush of joy is just like one warm day in January. It is better than nothing; but it is not of much value for practical uses. What you want is to learn how to create joy so that it shall be like the continuous sounds of a marriage bell, or like the coördinate sounds of many-voiced instruments. The question is, how joy shall spread itself through days and weeks in the midst of tribulations and troubles, and hold on its way, under the name of peace. You must learn that. But ah! men do not want to learn it.

There was a crystal, once, in a rock, which had conveyed to it the knowledge of the beauty of the outward world; and it prayed silently to the god of minerals that it would let it out, that it might see all this beauty. So the god sent a minealogist, one day, with a hammer, who, suspecting what was in the rock, commenced beating it, and broke one part off, and then another, and another. And by-and-by the crystal began to be seen. And then, with chisel the man began to cut the rock right and left. And the crystal, being somewhat bruised, and much crowded, and greatly terrified, cried out, "I asked for deliverance, and not for this harsh treatment and this cruelty." Is there any other way to get a crystal out of the middle of a rock but to break the rock in pieces?

There are men praying that God would give them joy; and he takes hold of them, and begins to break off the environments and besetments by which they are confined—false pleasures, false joys, false ambitions, and false attachments—giving strong blows on this side, bearing heavily on that side, and in ten thousand ways doing violence to their natural feelings; and they cry out, "Hast thou become altogether my enemy? Art thou against me?" If they would listen to the reply of the Spirit of God, they would hear him say, "Did you not want joy? And how can joy come but by bringing out the Christ

that is in you? And how can the Christ that is in you be brought out if you will not suffer the things that are necessary to bring it out?" You must learn how to be joyful under care; how to be joyful under shame; and how to be joyful under contempt. You must learn how to be cast out and yet be more than your circumstances. You must learn how to stand by the side of God, and say, "Though all the world were against thee, dear Jesus, thou and I are mightier than they;" and then there will be perfect joy that will be like summer at the equator, that knows no frost, and no winter.

That which is true of joy, is true also of truth and of honesty. Honesty is not a thing which men are inspired with. Nobody knows how to be honest except so far as he learns. Nobody knows how to tell the truth except just so far as he has learned. And it is a science which will bear a good deal of studying. Most people learn to tell the truth as thousands of people used to learn to read and write and cipher, in their old-fashioned common school education. When they had learned to read words of easy syllables, they thought they had learned to read. An after use of reading as a means of education did not enter into their conception. Many persons learn to speak the truth in that way. Many people speak the truth just as far as they are in words of two syllables; and many people are honest just as far as that. They are honest about as far as the spelling-book carries them, and not much further. But *truth in the inward parts*—truth in faith, truth in love, truth in thought and in expression, truth direct and indirect, in all the relations of life—is a profound study. It is a science of life. But very few have explored it to its ultimate points. No man can tell the truth except in a very superficial way. No man can be glowingly like an angel of truth till he has gone to school to learn how. And that which is true of truth in this respect is true of honesty.

And so of purity. So of fidelity in little things. So of each Christian experience, with all the elements of beauty in it. All those things which are meant when we speak of *putting on the whole armor of God*, are learned little by little. Men cannot gain them by inspiration. They cannot gain them by a day's or a year's life. They must grow up into them in all things.

Hence, when I hear men say that there are many departments of Christian life in which they are fruitless, in which they have no gifts, I say to myself, "That is, you have never developed your gifts." It is true that men have different gifts; but it is also true that many of us are without gifts in certain directions, because they are dormant. We have never taught ourselves to exercise those gifts. Every part of those gifts can come by education. And though the Christian life may not be full in all, it will be far more perfect in all than it is in any now.



4. The experiences of Christian life are not promiscuous. They stand in a certain order of nature. Just as in Summer all flowers do not blossom in Spring, nor wait till Autumn; as there is a regular succession, according to the temperament of the year, following a line of increasing heat; as there is an order of development in the tree; as there is first the leaf, and afterwards the green fruit, and then the ripe fruit, so is it in Christian life. Christ begins with us at the infant point, and develops in us steadily; and the later developments cannot be had until the intermediate ones are passed. We are steadily to grow; but at each point of growth we are, as it were, to seize the experiences of that point.

If this be so, it will undeceive us in respect to many of those yearnings and aspirations which we suppose to be signs and tokens of grace. Persons want those Christian experiences which they read of in Paul, or in John, without having had Paul's or John's history. They wish while children to be Christians as their fathers and mothers were, and to feel as they did. They want to anticipate the fruit of a long life, and have it in the first year of that life, which never can be.

When you were a boy you felt as I did, I suppose. You only wished that you were a man. And when you got on your first man's clothes, what an important day it was! and what an immense man you felt yourself to be! Boys, aspiring to manhood, want to learn to smoke, as a sign that they are men. They want to carry the various little insignia—and usually the vicious ones—of manhood. They long to be men at once, and are not content to be boys, and to come to manhood by proper unfoldings, and by the natural growth that takes place in Christian life. Persons are not willing to take the courses which belong to the state of development to which they have attained, but are constantly longing for those things which lie far on in the state to which they are going by-and-by. You must be a boy first, and then a youth, and then a man. Your experiences will follow the line of your true development inwardly.

Then comes the ripeness of Christian life. When, through years, or when through an experience that epitomizes years, men have known Christ, and the presence of Christ, and the power of Christ, then they come into a ripeness in which there is, comparatively, peace of mind.

I am sometimes asked, "Do you believe any man becomes perfect?" No, not perfect in any proper sense of that term. You may set up an artificial ideal of perfection; you may make it out of some question of obedience to law; a man may think himself to be perfect; but no man, to my judgment, is perfect who is unripe. And a man is not ripe so long as he lives in this world. He only approximates toward ripeness. But that which men feel after, and that which I re-

spect in those who seek perfection, is such an experience as grounds them in that *peace which passes all understanding*, and holds them steadfast, and is full of joy. I believe there are those who live in a state of perpetual tranquility and rest, with only occasional oscillations. And I believe that it is the privilege of Christian men, in their impure Christian condition, to reach that state in which they shall be praying always; praising always; rejoicing always. "Rejoice," says the apostle, "in the Lord; and again I say rejoice." I believe it is possible to attain these states. You do not need to raise technical questions of perfection. Only let the soul rise so that it always lives in the presence of God, and its Saviour, every hour and every moment, and that is enough. And it is attainable by-and-by, if men go through all the preliminary stages of experience, and are not discouraged, but patiently wait, until the time comes in which they rise to these higher experiences.

And now, my dear Christian brethren, how is it with you? At what stage are you of your Christian life? Go back, and how many years is it since you first named, before the world, the name of Jesus? Are you further along in conscious Christian experience than you were on that day? I am far from rebuking those who remember all their lives long the ecstasy of their early Christian life. There was something peculiar in it. Although later wedded life is incomparably richer than the earlier experiences of love, no matter how romantic they may be; yet one should not willingly part from the vision, though far back, of his first romantic love. Of all the things which the heart knows, the least ashamed should we be of our experiences of loving. Even when they are untaught, even when they are unripe fruit, they are the best fruit of our nature. And I should think that he had been badly mated, or had gone through a strange life, who, standing at eighty years, should say, "I thank God, above all things, for those first experiences of love that I had in my childhood." No, no, no! The companionship and the actual life of love, carried through a score or two scores of years, mounts up in magnitude, and stands continental in riches, clothed with an amount of fruit and joy which never can be had emotionally. The life of love is better than the mere emotion of love. And if it is so in the ordinary conditions of men one toward another, how much more is it so in the conditions of the soul toward God.

Our first experience may have been rapturous, full of surprise, full of unbelief, stimulating, far beyond anything that we have had since; because the narrower the experience, the sharper is the point of it; and the bulkier the experience, the less sharp it is. As one needle will pierce to the quick, but twenty needles taken all together are



blunted; so one single line of experience will arrest the attention, often, when the whole concurrent experiences of the soul, being more important, would not seem so great.

When first people think they are delivered from the power of sin and Satan and death; when they first have a triumphant feeling that Christ loves them, and they know they love Christ, there is something wonderful and beautiful in it, and they should remember it is as long as they live; but, after all, is that the best? And do you look back and say, "I never again had such experiences of love; I never again was so happy; I never again was so near to Christ?" Oh! what a life you have been living! Why, how far have you been? Is your Christ a babe yet? Born into your soul, did you turn the key of the chamber where he was? And did you send no schoolmaster and no nurse there? Did you starve the infant child? And has there never been any growth in that child? Is it but a phantom or vision in you? That child Jesus, born into your soul, should have grown, and should little by little have expelled the natural man, and swollen to all the proportions of your being, until he became Christ formed truly and perfectly in you.

How is it with you, dear Christian brethren? Have you grown in that part of your being which is represented by Christ's love, and humility, and disinterestedness? Have you imitated him in *going about doing good*? Have these elements of the divine nature in you severally grown and cohered symmetrically, and swollen to the proportions of full manhood?

On earth there is no sight more beautiful, and there never will be a sight more beautiful till He comes to reign a thousand years, than a character which has been steadfastly growing in every direction, and has come to old age rich and ripe. I am sorry to say that such characters are rare. Yet I would fain hope that in every neighborhood, or every line of relationship, there is some mother, some aunt, some saintly maiden sister, whose life has been a self-renunciation for the benefit of others, and who rises up to your eye bright, tranquil, sweet, unfathomable, always near to God, and always near to man. Are you like unto such? Have you walked the same path? Have you come into sympathy with that idea of Christian life and Christian character? Are you going backward? Are you standing still? Are you going forward? In which way are the motives of your spirit carrying you? Are they taking you away from God, or is God's spirit overcoming your natural selfishness, and bringing you nearer and nearer to him? The time is not far distant when you must render an account of this before the face of the Crucified.

Christian brethren, we have not long to live! It matters little

whether we have a roof or no roof over our heads; it matters little whether our name is kicked about as a football, or whether it is honored and crowned. These things are of very little consequence. That which we are to carry through the grave with us is not riches, nor fame, nor joy, but the essential structure of the soul,—its virtues; its moral magnanimities; its divinities. What have you to carry through? With what can you stand up in the sonship of God, and as heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ? How can you meet your God, and open your soul to him, and say, "Lord, here am I; and here are all my powers?" How can you stand before Christ and say, "I am in thine image, and I am satisfied?"

Oh! rise to that hour of satisfaction. There is not in the range of imagination anything conceivable like that. Oh! ever-restless heart; oh! ever-mourning spirit; oh! longing, yearning soul, there shall come an hour to thee when, if faithful to the Beloved, thou shalt rise into his presence, and behold the bright concave full of God's ministering spirits, and the Lord of glory on the throne; and thou shalt stand up unrebuked before them all; and, looking first upon them, and then upon yourself, shalt say, "I am satisfied. Nothing do I want from heaven or angels. I am satisfied. I am in thy likeness, and I am satisfied." To that blessed vision look forward, not only, but Christian brethren, prepare for the Bridegroom. And ere long, before we think, the sound will come, and we shall be summoned to go and meet our God.

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### PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We draw near to thee, our Father, not as those who have never beheld; for we have come often by this living way of love. We have communed with thee. We have received the tokens of thy favor and of thy love. Thou dost not love our sins and our imperfections; but we are beloved, and we have felt thine arms. We know the touch of thine hand of benediction upon our head. Often and often it hath encircled us. And when we walk in the consciousness of thy paternal love; when our strength is renewed by these divine touches, we are indeed sons of God, and royal; and there is no earthly crown that can so crown us as thine hand does. And there are no riches that can make us so strong as thy favor, and thy loving kindness. And there is no such summer, and no such delight in all innocent sport, as thou dost grant to us when thou surroundest all our affections with thine own paternal spirit. And we are like children that bound in joy at the feet of their parents. At times there are days that are dark because they are days of disobedience. At times we are homesick, because we are separated from thee. At times we long for thee, and have less of joy than of wishing for joy. But our life is with thine. Though in our trouble thou dost yet abide many days afar off, and our dear ones die, thou comest at last. Thou dost never forsake us, though thou dost often seem to leave us. Thou dost never deal harshly with us, though thou dost deal with us severely. Thou art faithful. Thou wilt not make us happy by self-love, exaggerating all

our excellences, and hiding all our faults. Thou dost make us look into the gulf of our own experience, and see what our passions are. And when thou art regnant in beauty, and all is harmony in thy nature before our sight, oh! with what discord our own life moves around about thine. Then we look away from thee to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. And yet thou dost not look upon us with abhorrence. Thou dost not even look upon us with the same abhorrence with which we look upon ourselves. For we are thy children, and are taken into thine arms to be healed. And thy love, though it would take sin from us as a disease, holds the essential self which we have in us. That germ which is the center of our being is dear to thee, and thou art looking far forward. Yea, as a blessed prophecy of love thou dost behold often in us what we are to be, rather than what we are, and roll on the days and the months and the years of experience, making haste to bear us forward that we may be without spot, or blemish, or wrinkle, and be presented before the throne of thy Father with infinite joy, and with glory unending.

And now, in this thy faithfulness, and in this thy great love, is all our hope. For, though we labor and strive, all our labor and strife is as the husbandman's toil in summer. If it were not for the summer it would be in vain. And as the summer brings forth its best fruit only for labor, so thou wilt not bring forth the best fruit in us without our labor. And yet, that labor is in thee. We live in thee. We move in thee. In thee we have our being. It is thy Spirit that works in us to will and to do. And in this joyful mystery—thy life in ours, we in thee, and thou in us,—we have traveled now many years. We are witnesses for thy truth. We are witnesses of thy fidelity. Thou dost not leave thy people. We are witnesses of thy generosity. Thou dost exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think. Our shadows are but half dark. Our life is full of radiance. And along the way, which is straight and narrow, and where we grind or cut ourselves, still are overhanging vines; and we pluck the clusters, and renew our strength, and go on again. Our life is ever watched. Angels are about us by day and by night airy messengers sent by God, full of love and faithfulness, and executing his will to those who shall be saved. We rejoice, O Lord! that thou hast been with us in all the emergencies of life; in times of peril; in times of vehement temptation; in times when all nature sets itself up against all that there is in us of grace. Thou hast, O Lord! divided for us the Red Sea and the Jordan, and we have gone over. For us, and in us, thou hast fought, and we have subdued the inhabitants of the land, though we have not put them utterly away. In thee we have been radiant and victorious, and gained many things, with the prospect of many more, and the hope and confidence of them. And we rejoice in all thy wondrous love and kindness that hath thus far befriended us. But oh! what is it to that which is to come? What is the substance, and what is the joy of the experience of thy sway here, compared with the vision of it which is kindled by thy word and by thy Spirit in our hearts? We rejoice in the coming perfection. We lift up feeble hands pointing toward strength. We look away, and see ourselves as we are to be when we are like thee. We behold ourselves in the vision of faith, triumphing over our infirmities, elate in eternal youth, mortal in purity and love, and the powers thereof. And we rejoice, O Lord! that thus we may beforehand have something of our truest manhood, and may sit down beforehand at the banquet of thy coming love.

So, we beseech of thee that we may use our heavenly vision, not to make us weary of the world, but more faithful in it; not to tell us of that food which we have here, but to give us the moral grace to partake of it with contentment, knowing that ere long we shall be no more travelers at an inn, but children at home in our Father's house.

And grant, O Lord! that the reality of this may comfort us in losses; may console us in griefs; may encourage us in despondency; may rebuke



us when we are faint hearted, and would turn away from our life. May we be able to bear burdens as good soldiers. Oh! help us more and more to sink self in the glory and honor of God in ourselves. May we become heroic for Christ's sake, bearing about that precious Name. May we not count it hard if we are cast out for Christ's sake. And if we are cast out for bearing testimony to thy name, may we remember what thou didst to him of old who was cast out of the Synagogue because he bore witness to thy kindness and faithfulness. Go unto men and speak peaceably and comfortably unto them, and encourage them to believe that, standing with Christ outside of the Synagogue, more are they that are for them than are they that are against them.

And we beseech of thee that thou wilt strengthen thy witnesses everywhere—those that silently bear witness amidst the cares and desponding duties of the household. Over-wearied with much watching; tried and troubled with vehement temptations; drawn every whither, still may they be able to triumph and become sons shrined in the household.

Help all those that are combating the world, and seeking to carve out their duties there. May they be able to wrestle with the mighty temptations that are brought to bear upon them, and overcome them all. And not only may they overcome temptations, but may they carry forward the work of holiness. And may justice shine in their hands. And may truth, like a star, fall upon the path that men should walk in. And so we beseech of thee that our young men may be strong and valiant for Christ everywhere.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless all those who are sick; all those who are withheld from the house of worship. May that Spirit which makes this place light and joyful be borne unto them. Give them a portion in due season. And may those walk, leaning on thine arm, whose feet go down to the valley of the shadow of death. And all the way through may thy rod and thy staff comfort them. Bear them beyond the flood, beyond the touch of death, and into the glories of immortality.

Be near to all those, to-day, who would render thanks in thine house for great mercies shown them. Accept the thanks of those who have come once again to the house of God for the first time in a long while. Remember children and companions, dearer than life, spared by thee. May they not forget their secret thoughts and the vows of their hearts when they plead with God for mercies. And now that thy mercies have come and crowned them with victory, may they not forget their covenants.

And accept the desires of those who are as strangers in a strange land in our midst to-day. If there are any that are homesick, O Lord Jesus! comfort them. If there are those whose hearts ache, and turn back, and find their beloved ones scattered everywhither, yet by faith may they be able to meet them all again in the house of prayer, in their Father's house.

Be with all those, we beseech thee, who labor in our Sabbath-schools and Bible-classes, and who go forth among the neglected and the poor, to carry the Gospel of humanity and of salvation through Jesus Christ to them. And we pray that they may never weary in well-doing, in season and out of season. They shall reap if they faint not.

And we pray that thy work may go on in thy Churches. More and more may thy truth be a living truth. More and more may it have power on the lives and hearts and dispositions of the people. May it be diffused in the experiences of thy Churches. Let thy kingdom come, everywhere. May woes, and the occasion of them, cease. And may despotisms pass away. May superstition be utterly overthrown. May the sweet truth of God's love in Christ Jesus carry emancipation everywhere. May humanity, and peace, and order, and thy kingdom, descend and dwell upon the earth, and Christ come and reign a thousand years.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

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Of six First-Class Makers,  
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